

Learners' Perceptions of How Anxiety Interacts With Personal and Instructional Factors to Influence Their Achievement in English: A Qualitative Analysis of EFL Learners in China

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Although many researchers have examined the effects of anxiety on second language learning in recent years, the specific sources and effects of language anxiety have not yet been clearly established. Moreover, few studies have specifically examined anxiety from the learner's perspective. Although previous interview and diary studies have pointed to a number of interesting relationships between anxiety and other variables, conclusions have been based on the researchers' personal interpretations of learner statements. The present study examines learners' perceptions of how students' anxiety works together with other variables in influencing language learning. Twenty-one students with varying levels of anxiety were interviewed for this study, a theoretical model was generated, and a sequential order of influence among the major affinities was indicated.

Keywords language anxiety; affective factors; individual differences; social influences; qualitative study; grounded-theory analysis (GTA); interview study; learner perception; Chinese learners; foreign language learning

Problems associated with anxiety in language learning have been well documented. For example, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) observed that in

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foreign language classes, anxious learners had difficulty in speaking and in discriminating the sounds and structures of a target language message. Early research on language anxiety “provided mixed and confusing results” (Scovel, 1991, p. 17) due to problematic definitions of anxiety, the lack of a reliable and valid measure specific to language learning (Horwitz et al.), and insufficiently sensitive outcome measures (Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986). Advances in foreign language anxiety theory and instruments emerged in the mid-1980s (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a). Horwitz et al. defined foreign language anxiety as a separate and distinct phenomenon particular to language learning (Young, 1991), and research that has focused specifically on the construct of language anxiety (Aida, 1994; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991b, 1991c; Liu, 1989; Philips, 1992; Saito & Samimy, 1996) has found a consistent inverse relationship between anxiety and second language (L2) achievement (Horwitz, 2001).

Although a negative correlation between foreign language classroom anxiety and achievement seems to have been established, it is also clear that anxiety does not work in isolation. A number of studies have sought to identify factors associated with language anxiety (see, e.g., Cheng, 2002; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 2000). In interviews with noted language learning specialists, Young (1992) suggested a number of factors intuitively associated with anxiety in foreign language settings. Specifically, the experts felt that motivation, cultural factors, the students’ own coping skills, attention, self-concept, beliefs about language learning, and the specific teaching methodology the student experiences all play a role in learner anxiety. Similarly, based on a review of the literature, Young (1991) proposed six potential sources of language anxiety: (a) personal and interpersonal anxieties, (b) learner beliefs about language learning, (c) instructor beliefs about language teaching, (d) instructor-learner interactions, (e) classroom procedures, and (f) language testing. In spite of these efforts, a question remains as to how anxiety interacts with other individual factors related to L2 achievement.

Several studies, however, have suggested that anxiety is a result not a cause of poor learning ability. Sparks and Ganschow and their colleagues (see, e.g., Ganschow, Sparks, Anderson, Javorsky, Skinner, et al., 1994; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1996; Sparks, Ganschow, & Javorsky, 2000; Sparks, Ganschow, & Pohlman, 1989) have argued that there might be a confounding interaction between anxiety and first language (L1) skills and posit a subtle language learning disability in some learners. In response, MacIntyre (1995) suggested that many individual difference variables, including anxiety, interact to impact language learning, and Horwitz (2000) argued that the

pervasiveness of anxiety and its existence in successful language learners disproves the contention that all anxiety stems from learning disabilities.

These discussions have raised questions about the relationships between and among language anxiety and other learner factors as well as achievement, but few studies have examined the interaction of anxiety and other learner characteristics thoroughly. One promising means to better understand the role of anxiety in language learning would be to interview learners about their feelings about language learning, an approach seldom used previously. In an interview study (Price, 1991), students reported that some of their personal characteristics, especially a tendency to be "overtly perfectionistic" (p. 106), might have led to their anxiety in language classes, a finding supported by Gregersen and Horwitz (2002). Similarly, in a diary study, Bailey (1983) found that learners' competitive natures were a source of anxiety. Hilleson's study (1996) of a group of students living abroad went beyond language classrooms. Using both diaries and interviews together with observations and questionnaires, the researcher found that factors such as comparing with others and the need to communicate and perform in an unfamiliar language were related to anxiety. Shamim (1996) conducted interviews and class observations in Pakistan investigating the influence of seat arrangements in large classrooms on student learning. The findings showed that students sitting in the "front zone" performed better than those sitting in the "back zones"; the former were considered to be industrious and hardworking, whereas the latter were considered as "dull" or "bad" students.

Although the findings of previous studies point to several potential sources and consequences of language anxiety, their reliance on questionnaires do not allow for an examination of how anxiety interacts with other learner or situational factors to influence language learning. Studies that encourage learner reflection through interviews or diary entries would seem to have the potential to yield a richer understanding of learners' perceptions of how anxiety functions in their language learning, which, in turn, might lead to a clearer understanding of the general role of anxiety in language learning. Thus, this study attempts to go beyond the simple identification of relationships between pairs of learner characteristics to the generation of a theoretical model depicting how anxiety works with a larger number of learner and situational variables in influencing language achievement. In addition, in examining anxiety in China, this study extends the work on language anxiety to a non-Western, English as a foreign language (EFL) context. As the majority of previous research on anxiety has been conducted in foreign language settings in the United States and Canada, it is important to examine anxiety in a context in which successful language learning can result in important real-world rewards.

In order to study learners' perceptions of the role of anxiety in their language learning, an interview study was designed to address the following research questions:

- I. What factors do learners associate with foreign language anxiety?
- II. According to the participants, what are the relationships between and among anxiety and those other language learning factors?
- III. According to the participants, how do these factors interact in affecting foreign language achievement?

To address these questions, a three-stage grounded-theory analysis (GTA) of the interview responses was used to identify commonalities or "affinities" among the learner comments. GTA was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to derive meaningful, data-based categories in discovery-oriented qualitative studies (see Glaser & Strauss; Hutchinson, 1988; Northcutt, 1999; Northcutt, Miles, Robins, & Ellis, 1998; Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yan, 1998). Grounded theory is defined by Strauss and Corbin as "a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (p. 158). Although the grounded-theory approach has been modified over time, "essentially, grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 509).

Grounded-theory analysis was selected as the analytic approach for this study for several reasons. As this study sought to identify factors that the learners associated with anxiety, this approach seemed ideal. In addition, to achieve a broad perspective on the experience of students with various levels of anxiety, a relatively large number of participants (21) and lengthy interviews were included. Thus, it was necessary to select an approach that could systematically incorporate all of the learners and their comments. Finally, the purpose of grounded theory is the generation of a model based on participants' perceptions of a phenomenon, an outcome that corresponded perfectly with the purpose of this study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) a grounded-theory model has been "inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents" (p. 23) and is "grounded" in the participants' own perceptions as well as their specific learning context.

Method

Participants

To understand how anxiety functions in language learning, it was necessary to include learners with a range of anxiety levels. For that reason, the first author

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for the three anxiety level groups

	<i>N</i>		Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing	25	50	75
Anxiety scale (FLCAS)	532	0	92.00	104.50	115.00

Note. The 39-item adapted FLCAS score ranges from 39 to 195.

adapted the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986) and administered it to 532 first-year through fourth-year business majors in a university in Shanghai, People's Republic of China. Based on their FLCAS scores, participants were classified as having high, moderate, and low levels of anxiety. FLCAS scores at the 25th and 75th quartiles were used as cutoff points for the classification. Table 1 shows the mean FLCAS scores for the three groups.

Based on their FLCAS scores, six students each were chosen randomly from course levels 1 through 4. Of the six at each level, two (one female and one male) were chosen from each of the high, moderate, and low anxiety groups. Only three students (two male and one female) from level 4 (one from each of the anxiety level groups) agreed to participate due to their heavy schedules. Thus, the resulting 21 participants included high-, moderate-, and low-anxious students from each course level. In addition, with the exception of the fourth-year participants, there were an equal number of male and female interviewees. The participants ranged in age from 17 to 21 years and had studied English for at least 6 years in high school before entering the university. Table 2 shows the characteristics and numbers of the various participants.

An interesting circumstance of this specific learning context should be noted. English courses are more strongly emphasized for business majors at Institution X than in other institutions in China. In addition, because the university was originally an institute specializing in foreign languages, Institution X has maintained a tradition of a diversified English curriculum, including specialized courses for listening and speaking, intensive reading, extensive reading, and so forth.

Interview Protocol

A focus group interview of six graduate students from China at Institution Y in the United States was conducted. The purpose of this pilot study was to help generate questions for the interview protocol (see the Appendix, Part A). Specifically, the participants were asked to brainstorm about their undergraduate

Table 2 Characteristics and numbers of the participants

Level of anxiety	Course level 1	Course level 2	Course level 3	Course level 4	Total no. of students in each category
High	2	2	2	1	7
Male	1	1	1	1	4
Female	1	1	1	0	3
Moderate	2	2	2	1	7
Male	1	1	1	1	4
Female	1	1	1	0	3
Low	2	2	2	1	7
Male	1	1	1	0	3
Female	1	1	1	1	4
No. of students in each course level	6	6	6	3	21
Male	3	3	3	2	11
Female	3	3	3	1	10

language learning experiences in China and reflect on any anxiety they experienced and its role in their language learning. They were asked to consider language achievement and personal factors that might have influenced their anxiety. Their responses were analyzed and grouped into 11 themes that the focus group participants associated with anxiety and English learning in China, and questions were written which explored each theme: (a) Genetic and Personal Characteristics; (b) Social and Cultural Elements; (c) Anxieties; (d) Class Arrangements; (e) Teacher Characteristics; (f) Test Types; (g) Motivation and Interest; (h) Individual Learning Approaches; (i) Influence of First Language (Chinese); (j) Regional Differences; and (k) Achievement. Therefore, the questions to be asked in the real interviews will be based on, but not limited to, a range of possible problems. The resulting questions were translated into Chinese and back-translated into English to ensure consistency between the English and Chinese versions.

Data Collection Procedure

The resulting interview was semi-structured; that is, the interview protocol was used only as a general guide so that issues that had not been previously raised by the participants in the pilot study could be addressed. The interviews were conducted by the first author, a native speaker of Mandarin, in Mandarin Chinese and lasted around 30–40 min each. Each interview was audio-recorded

with the consent of the participant. The audio-tapes were later transcribed by native speakers of Mandarin Chinese.

Data Analysis

Consistent with GTA procedures, the analysis of the interview data progressed in three major steps (Miles, 1997; Northcutt, 1999; Northcutt et al., 1998): (a) thematic analysis; (b) generation of affinities or variables; and (c) interrelationship digraph analysis.

Each step was an important component of the GTA process.

Step 1: Thematic analysis. The purpose of utilizing thematic analysis techniques was “finding and marking the underlying ideas in the data, grouping similar information together, and relating different ideas and themes to one another” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 229). In this step, a coding procedure with three levels was conducted. In the Level 1 coding, the first author read the transcripts of the interviews intensively and then organized the data into small units of basic ideas. Each basic idea unit along with the original quotations of the interviewees was physically 1 copied onto a 4×6 index card, and preliminary codes were assigned to all the ideas that were related to the research questions. In the Level 2 coding, patterns were identified through comparisons of the basic ideas, and cards with similar themes were grouped together. Labels were assigned to the divisions and subdivisions of each theme. Finally, in the Level 3 coding, the themes generated from Level 2 were converted to higher and more abstract theoretical constructs through cross-category comparisons.

Step 2: Generation of affinities or variables. During this step, the results from Step 1 were further organized into thematically defined clusters referred to as affinities. Through several rounds of logic and integrity checks, comparisons, and rearrangements, final labels were assigned to each of the affinities.

Step 3: Interrelationship digraph analysis. The purpose of the third step, the interrelationship digraph analysis was to identify the nature of the relationships between and among the affinities, that is to understand how the affinities were linked. In this step, connections of each construct were identified through a rereading of the original data, and directional relationships among affinities were decided upon based on comments that had “correlational” or associative connotations. For example, a comment by one student indicated that certain class arrangements made him or her feel anxious: “I feel that it’s mainly because, say, whichever part you are not so good at, when teachers ask you to do exercises for it, you will feel very nervous, not

confident.” Based on this and similar comments, a directional relationship between the affinity Class Arrangement and the Foreign Language Anxiety was determined: Class Arrangement → Foreign Language Anxiety. In this way, an interrelationship digraph matrix for all the data was produced, with the direction of influence between each pair of affinities indicated by an arrow. Affinities with arrows pointing toward the right were labeled as “drivers”; those with arrows pointing toward the left were “outcomes.” The interrelationship digraph analysis results led to a grounded theory model depicting the interaction between the affinities with respect to anxiety and language learning. The resulting model is presented below.

Results

Major Thematic Affinities

Through the affinity-generating process, 12 major thematic affinities (variables) related to anxiety were identified from the interview transcripts:

1. Regional Differences: These comments referred to the social and cultural differences that the students perceived to exist between different geographical areas in China, including differences in primary language, educational systems, and economic development.
2. Language Aptitude: These comments referred to abilities and talents that the participants viewed as specifically related to language learning.
3. Gender: These comments referred to special characteristics that the interviewees believed distinguished males from females with respect to language learning.
4. Foreign Language Anxiety: These comments referred to specific anxious feelings toward foreign language learning experienced by the participants.
5. Language Learning Interest and Motivation: *Interest*: These comments referred to favorable attitudes and concerns towards language learning. *Motivation*: These comments referred to the desires, goals, and directed efforts the students expressed about language learning.
6. Class Arrangements: These comments referred to the ways classroom language learning was organized, including class activities, textbooks and other materials, student-teacher ratios, and seating arrangements.
7. Teacher Characteristics: These comments referred to teachers' personalities, philosophies, and skills in language teaching.
8. Language Learning Strategies: These comments referred to the techniques and methods the students used to complete language learning tasks and to further develop their English competence.

9. Test Types: These comments referred to factors related to the content and types of English tests and other sources of evaluation.
10. Parental Influence: These comments referred to the concerns and behaviors of the participants' parents related to language learning.
11. Comparison with Peers: These comments referred to the environment and atmosphere resulting from peer competition and influence.
12. Achievement: Learning outcomes. These comments referred to students' levels of achievement in English.

Affinity 1: Regional Differences

This first affinity identified by the GTA was somewhat surprising because students' geographic backgrounds had never previously appeared in the literature as a source of anxiety. The issue of regional differences seems especially related to language learning in China as well and particularly to Shanghai, where Institution X is located.

When I just came here, I found even the doorman in the hotel speaks English. I couldn't understand what he said.

Many of the participants reported being shocked when they entered the university to find that their English was "poor" compared to other students, especially to that of the Shanghaiese students. The students believed that regional differences in dialects and educational systems as well as other social and cultural factors affected their level of English ability. Accordingly, they were worried about succeeding in their current academic environment.

Affinity 2: Language Aptitude

The participants thought that in order to do well in English, several specific personal characteristics were necessary, such as a good memory, sensibility to language, an ability to imitate, and good listening and verbal abilities. Importantly, many of the participants felt pressure because they believed that their classmates were more talented in these areas than they were.

I feel I am a little dumb. . . Sometimes (smart) people can get twice the results with half the effort. Getting twice the results with half the effort and getting half the result with twice the effort are way too different! I am not very gifted, because I react. . . I think reaction is very important for language. . . The speed of brain reaction and pronunciation is very important. . . my brain can't think fast sometimes. . . Some people. . . like some classmates of ours. . . (who are) more gifted. . . think very fast. Their speaking speed is also very fast. If I speak fast, sometimes after I finish one sentence, I can't think of the next one.

Affinity 3: Gender

Many opinions were offered about gender and language learning. Most participants believed that females were better language learners than males. Females were also seen as more talented using language in general, more expressive, and simply harder working.

I think girls are a little bit better than boys. They are more talented in language, and I feel that girls work harder. . .

Some students thought that females cared more about grades than males and therefore, they used different approaches to language learning.

Girls get better grades, but I think boys, maybe, read more widely. Girls pay more attention to grades.

Affinity 4: Foreign Language Anxiety

This study was designed to determine the interactions of foreign language anxiety and other learning variables; therefore, it was expected that anxiety would emerge as one of the variables considered by the students as influencing their language learning. In addition, the participants in this study were selected to represent different levels of anxiety, and comments reflecting these levels could be identified easily. Some students expressed very strong feelings of language anxiety, whereas others did not.

Interestingly, whatever their level of anxiety, students' comments were entirely associated with listening and speaking in English:

(In listening classes) I feel anxious and I can't reply. I am anxious, very anxious. The more anxious I feel the more confused I am. Sometimes the stuff you couldn't understand in class, you take it back and listen to it in the dorm, and you could understand! It's just like this. I am scared, anxious, and then I can't hear clearly; neither can I say anything.

The students believed that anxiety strongly interfered with their classroom performance and made them feel incapable, frustrated, and sometimes even angry. It is important to note, however, that some participants perceived little or no anxiety. Others recalled that they had experienced anxiety about language learning at some time in the past, but that they had overcome it.

It seems that I had this kind of feeling (anxiety) before—that is, in class when the teacher suddenly asked you (to speak) . . .

Affinity 5: Language Learning Interest and Motivation

I don't feel much pressure, mainly because I am interested in English, and I work hard. Now I don't feel it's very hard to learn this language, and this is the reason.

Because English is a required course in China, it is especially important to examine interest and motivation and their relationships with anxiety. In fact, for these students, interest and motivation do not appear to be separable, and many students saw interest as a source of motivation. In contrast, some thought that interest was beside the point: “like it or not,” English had to be learned well in order to be successful in China. Several participants mentioned that they had to deliberately “cultivate” their interest in English because a strong motivation was necessary to “maintain” interest.

Now it is no longer an interest, because English is already the most important stuff, the most important at present . . . If you are not interested, you have to treat it as if you are interested. Generally speaking, one needs to have a very strong desire from inside . . . Only by this, can you maintain your interest and continue learning.

Some students also expressed the view that “interest” influenced feelings toward learning English and that these feelings, in turn, affected the way they studied. When they were interested, they could study for long periods of time and still feel “fresh” and unpressured. Others reported feeling anxious and unable to concentrate when they were not interested. Their anxiety would increase during long tasks or evaluation situations.

I feel that it (to be interested or not) makes a big difference. As far as I am concerned, I am very interested in English. Oh, I would, I would, (sigh) . . . the class time is pretty long, pretty long. Sometimes you feel pretty tired at the end, but I feel that I am still very energetic. There is no problem for me to listen until the end. But . . . for those who treat English learning as a task, I feel that they might . . . get a little anxious at the end. The more they listen, the more anxious they get, because, for example, if there is one part they didn't get it, the new parts would still keep on coming. Then they would just pick up the sesame seeds but overlook the watermelons (Chinese idiom, meaning mindful of small matters to the neglect of large ones; penny wise and pound foolish).

Finally, some students reported that anxiety actually made them lose interest in learning English:

Since I feel so nervous in that class (Class on Listening and Speaking), I had no interest in it.

Affinity 6: Class Arrangement

Although the participants had all previously been the top English students in their respective provinces, they had different levels of English proficiency.

Despite these ability differences, however, they were all obliged to attend identical classes at Institution X. Thus, some students felt uneasy in classes in which they perceived the level to be too difficult.

I hope the teacher doesn't try to help the shoots grow by pulling them upward (spoil things by excessive enthusiasm) . . . our levels are uneven, and it's really miserable. Some people feel very comfortable (in class); some people feel so uneasy that they wish they were dead.

The large university classes made it especially difficult for individuals to feel that their personal language learning needs were being met.

Should one teacher only deal with 10 people, he/she can let everybody talk.

The interviewees also had strong feelings about how their English classes should function. They preferred a relaxed, lively, and open classroom atmosphere. Some students even favored particular seating arrangements and groupings.

In order to change the classroom atmosphere, I think first of all, we need to rearrange the seats. If one wants to sit with certain people, let them sit together and form a discussion group. It's better to study this way. Don't let the teacher stand at the podium, and we sit down here – now it's almost still like this.

Most of the students were not used to volunteering to speak in class. They were not simply afraid of making mistakes; they were afraid of being labeled as “Liking To Show Off,” especially when they were not completely sure of their answers. They believed that they would be laughed at if they were wrong. Even worse was being labeled “Knowing Nothing But Liking To Show Off” (a particularly shameful behavior in Chinese culture). Thus, few people liked to volunteer answers. Being called on, however, was a different matter: “I was forced to try to answer this question; if I am right, it's an honor; if wrong, at least I wasn't trying to show off.”

So, sometimes when students “sort of” knew an answer, they silently hoped that the teacher would call on them. There seemed to be a tacit understanding between the teachers and students: When students wanted to answer a question, they would look at the teacher, but when they did not want to be called on, they would lower their heads. Of course, when everyone's heads were lowered, the teacher was forced to call on someone, making many feel nervous. A small number of students admitted that they were one of “those few people who always liked to talk in class.”

I think that in the college, there is a tacit agreement between the teacher and the students. You don't have to raise your hand. (From) the way you looked at the teacher, for example, the teacher would know.

Since we all had our head lowered, the teacher had no way out, he/she had to call on someone.

When I have organized my answer, I wish very much the teacher would call me. If I raise my hand, others would think: "This person likes to show off."

Affinity 7: Teacher Characteristics

The teacher characteristics and class arrangements affinities are closely related because classes are organized by teachers. In general, the students believed that teachers who were lively, dynamic, and energetic provided a supportive atmosphere for oral expression.

The teacher in the first year was monotonous and dull; then in the second year, we had another one, and she was very lively in class. She asked us to become active, more dynamic. But we were not used to (that) in the beginning, since we were more used to the way things were in the first year, that kind of . . . model. Then, after a long time, we started to form the habit of discussing what the teacher said in class. That took a long, long time . . . If you are used to this way, to talk right away, you won't be afraid . . . I think it is pretty important. If many students are talking, I can also jump in with one or two sentences.

The students also liked humor. They thought that teachers with a sense of humor provided a more relaxed atmosphere and lessened the pressure on students.

My favorite kind of teacher . . . should have a strong sense of humor, from time to time do . . . something funny . . . providing a kind of relaxing atmosphere, instead of a stiff atmosphere with very high pressure.

The students found important differences between their Chinese and Western teachers. The interviewees reported that the foreign teachers used creative activities and were good at providing a pressure-free atmosphere. However, they also felt that foreign teachers often wasted time, and for that reason, students did not learn very much in their classes.

Although the American teachers are good at creating an atmosphere, there aren't a lot of things we can learn in class.

The content they are teaching is not very useful, but the ways they put it are very interesting . . . For example, he let us guess a word, he talked about this stuff, and then, let us guess what this means . . . the students

were all activated by him, we were all guessing what it was . . . Although it took a long time in doing this, I think that the atmosphere was pretty good.

Some foreign teachers actually “shocked” these Chinese students by deviating from the expected formal student-teacher relationship in China. Some of their foreign teachers acted inappropriately in these learners’ eyes.

A foreign teacher we had was really ignorant . . . he always talked about other stuff. . . his concept of value was very different from ours. I was really surprised by the examples he gave. For example, he would say, if I pay you 50,000 dollars, would you appear naked in public?

The foreign teacher was about 30 to 40 years old, but in class it seemed that he was the teacher, and we were teachers too. He constantly asked us how to say this or that in Chinese. We taught each other for a whole semester.

These students also objected to their foreign teachers’ lack of qualifications. Few of the foreign teachers were TESOL specialists, and some were not even trained teachers.

I have a feeling that our foreign teachers were not originally language teachers. They were, for example, geography or philosophy teachers. They are here just because they are native speakers, and they can speak with us.

Affinity 8: Language Learning Strategies

Many of the participants expressed concern over their inability to find effective language learning strategies.

Since the first year in college, especially in the first year, I couldn’t find a right way to study, so I felt that I had no interest in learning. I felt that I had studied so much, so much, but I was still the last one.

Some students reported that they had tried many learning strategies, but that their search was “like fighting a guerrilla war,” as one student put it, “attacking here and there.” Many felt that they could have been more successful in English if they had found an effective learning approach early on and used it consistently. Some students, however, recognized that “grabbing things here and there” had somehow worked for them because they had achieved an above average English level.

I haven’t found the best method for me yet, . . . But by grabbing things here and there, I have still arrived at this level (which was not bad!).

Other students complained that they were not able to use their preferred learning strategies because of curricular constraints.

Sometimes I feel that I might have already learned some pretty effective ways of learning, but since the school schedule is too tight, I can't use these methods. I have to learn the things arranged by the teachers.

Affinity 9: Test Types

Not surprisingly, test types were also found to influence how students studied the language and their affective response toward the learning process. Several students regretted having to spend a large amount of time studying the textbook in order to do well on tests.

Now a lot of test stuff is from the text. I usually read the textbook after class, and then buy some exercise books to practice . . . It takes most of the time, that is to say, it takes most of the foreign language learning time, mainly read the stuff in the textbook and do some exercises for it.

Affinity 10: Parental Influence

Comments from the interviewees showed that parents had played and were still playing an active role in their English learning. As some students put it, their parents had always hoped that they would one day “grow into useful timber” or “turn into dragons” (two Chinese idioms, meaning to become useful or to eventually achieve something important). It seemed that the parents of these college students were very aware that to be successful in Chinese society, it is essential to be good at a foreign language, especially English.

At that time (when young) I thought: What use is it? I didn't know. But they (my parents) said: “This stuff will be useful for you in the future, and you must learn well; if you don't learn well, it will become a big obstacle for you.” Then I remember these words, they have always been there in my mind, and I have never doubted.

Some comments showed that the parents not only expected their children to do well in English but also advised them on specific learning strategies and activities.

They (my parents) see to it that I speak some English every day, that is, talk a little bit and listen a little bit . . . This is very important, so they have supervised and urged me.

I have never been to the “English Corner” since my father told me not to go. He said: “People there are all Chinese, what they are speaking is Chinese style English. Your oral English would be . . .” Anyway, I would not be able to speak well there. But I always feel I don't have much chance to practice.

Even when parents did not know much about English, they still offered advice.

My parents, since they don't know anything about English, can only . . . show me the big direction. They are unable to, on the "micro" side, for example, to talk with me about this word, that sentence . . . They are unable to help me with these. They can only tell me, how much time I should assign to the foreign language study, how much to assign to other subjects.

The importance of parents' guidance can be seen in a somewhat negative comment of a highly anxious student; he blamed his parents because he did not have a solid foundation in English. According to him, it was because his parents had not realized the importance of English at an early enough time in his childhood.

Affinity 11: Comparison With Peers

Many students believed strongly and probably correctly that there was a great difference in English ability between them and their peers.

When we are doing some exercises, I would feel that others get more things right than I do, and, for example, when the teachers are saying something . . . others are more fluent than I am. When I am talking, I am nervous and stuttering. The difference is obvious.

Many students also felt "anxious," "uncomfortable," and "envious" because of these perceived differences.

When listening to the teachers' lectures, they can all understand, but I can't. I feel very anxious.

The pressure is great. If you are not as good as the others, you always see that others learn faster: this is easy for them and that is also easy for them . . . I feel how come I am not as good as others? I am not dumb or anything. I feel very uncomfortable.

Interestingly, some students felt that pressure resulting from comparing themselves to their peers became a kind of motivation in itself that forced them to work harder. For them, peers constituted a kind of language learning environment, and if others worked harder or did better, they would also be pulled up. In other words, they believed that the pace of others would affect their own.

Peer pressure would make you . . . urge you up, not to let anyone sink low. If in the environment around you, everybody is watching TV, reading novels . . . if there is not a very tight atmosphere, not a kind of fast pace, then your pace would also slow down. But if there is a kind of fast pace around you, your pace . . . would also gradually catch up.

Affinity 12: Achievement

Achievement or learning outcomes were frequently mentioned in the learner comments, and, consequently, this final affinity was derived from the data related to the 11 previously identified affinities.

There are people who can't learn well no matter how hard they try. In our class, students' English levels are pretty similar, but there were two students who are not so good, two who are very good . . .

Generally speaking, the pronunciation of Shanghai students is better than that of Northerners . . . and also better than that of Southern people.

Girls get better grades . . .

Other people can easily say something, but when it's my turn, I always feel a bit difficult, especially in speaking.

I feel my poorest part is listening, my oral English is even worse . . .

For these students, achievement in English included the following:

1. Doing well in tests.
2. Speaking with accent free pronunciation.
3. Speaking fluently.
4. Communicating with native speakers in the target language.
5. Functioning well in normal class activities.

Interrelationship Digraph Analysis

Through interrelationship digraph analysis, an interrelationship digraph matrix was constructed to “show the interconnectedness” (Miles, 1997, p. 303) of the affinities and to identify the sequential order of influence among them. The interrelationship digraph matrix for the interview data in this study is shown in Figure 1.

The affinities were next ranked according to their capacity for influencing or “driving” other affinities. Those of higher ranks—influencing rather than being influenced—were called “drivers”; those that were mainly influenced by other variables were called “outcomes.” The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 3.

A Grounded-Theory Model

Based on the directional interconnectedness analyses discussed here, a grounded-theory model of English learning was formulated in which anxiety was examined in relation to the other learning factors. The model shows possible paths leading to anxiety and ultimately to achievement in English (the

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	outs	ins	outs-ins
1. Regional Differences				→						→	→	→	4	0	4
2. Language Aptitude			←								→	→	2	1	1
3. Gender		→			→			→				→	4	0	4
4. Foreign Language Anxiety	←				→	←	←	←	←	←	←	→	2	8	-6
5. Language Learning Interest & Motivation			←	←		←	←	←	←	←	←	→	2	8	-6
6. Class Arrangement				→	→		←				→	→	4	1	3
7. Teacher Characteristics				→	→	→						→	4	0	4
8. Learning Strategies			←	→	→				←	←	←	→	3	4	-1
9. Test Types				→	→			→				→	4	0	4
10. Parental Influence	←			→	→			→				→	4	1	3
11. Comparison with Peers	←	←		→	→	←		→				→	4	3	1
12. Achievement	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←		0	11	-11

Note. Numbers across the top of the columns correspond to the numbers and categories identified in the first column. Arrows identify relationships between the concepts in the columns and rows—arrows pointing to the right or “out” (→) indicate that concepts in the row drive the corresponding concepts in the column above (e.g., in the place where row 7 and column 6 intersect, a right or “out” arrow can be found, which means that Teacher Characteristics “drives” Class Arrangement); arrows pointing to the left or “in” (←) indicate that concepts in the column drive concepts in the row to the left of the arrow (e.g., The left or “in” arrow in the intersection of row 6 and column 7 means that Class Arrangement is “driven” by Teacher Characteristics.)

Figure 1 Interrelationship diagram matrix.

learning outcome). Figure 2 is the graphic display of the resulting grounded-theory model.

Functional Categories of the Model

The variables in this model, which are classified into four categories from left to right in Figure 2, function as a system suggesting how these learners believe that anxiety interacts with other factors in affecting language achievement. The first category consists of six variables: Regional Differences, Test Types, Gender, Class Arrangement, Teacher Characteristics, and Parental Influence. Because these variables were perceived to exert direct or indirect influence on every other variable in the model, they are considered “primary drivers” in the system. The second category includes Language Aptitude, Comparison with Peers, and Learning Strategies². These factors are influenced or “driven” by affinities in the first category but also exert influence or “drive” affinities in the third category. Foreign Language Anxiety and Interest and Motivation form the third category. Compared with variables in the first two categories, these

Table 3 Interrelationship digraph analysis

		OUT	IN	OUT-IN ^a
Primary driver	Gender	4	0	4
Primary driver	Regional Differences	4	0	4
Primary driver	Teacher Characteristics	4	0	4
Primary driver	Test Types	4	0	4
Primary driver	Class Arrangement	4	1	3
Primary driver	Parental Influence	4	1	3
Mediating driver	Language Aptitude	2	1	1
Mediating driver	Comparison with Peers	4	3	1
Mediating driver	Learning Strategies	3	4	-1
Mediating outcome	Anxiety	2	8	-6
Mediating outcome	Language Learning Interest and Motivation	2	8	-6
Primary outcome	Achievement	0	11	-11

Note. The degree of influence is decided by the difference between the number of outgoing arrows (→) and the incoming arrows (←). The affinities with similar OUT-IN balance figures are grouped together in the same category.

^a“Out” is an arrow that points to the right; “in” is an arrow that points to the left.

third-category factors are more likely “to be influenced” rather than “to be influencing.” The final category displayed in the model is Achievement. This factor is directly or indirectly influenced by all the variables to its left in the model.

Relationships Within the Model

The affinities in the model are linked with one another by means of arrows. These arrows indicate the sequential order among the affinities; they do not, however, imply “simplistic, unilateral, causal relationships” (Miles, 1997, p. 307). The following sets of relationships were identified in the model:

Regional Differences → *Parental Influence*. The findings suggest that people in different areas had different attitudes toward their children’s English education. In Shanghai, for example, as a cosmopolitan and economically developing city, English was considered important for a student’s future, and many parents sent their children to English classes or hired English tutors. In other regions such as Inner Mongolia, English was not considered to be very useful in daily life, and parents paid no more attention to it than to other school subjects. One student from Inner Mongolia even suggested that English was seen as less important than other school subjects.

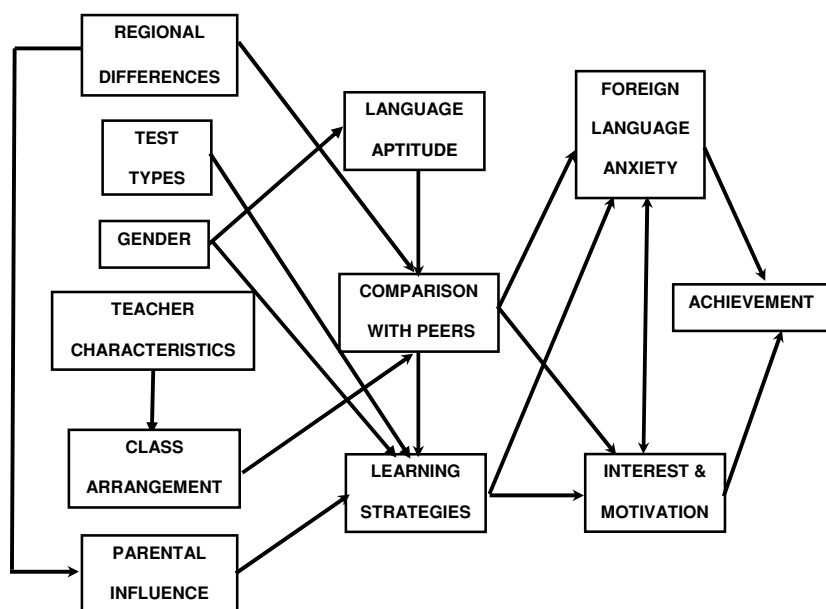


Figure 2 The grounded-theory model.

Regional Differences → Comparison With Peers. Students from different parts of China typically have different levels of English ability upon entering college. Those students who were from areas perceived to have better basic English training because oral communication was emphasized were seen as exerting pressure on students from other areas. For example, students from Shanghai were believed to be better in class, especially in the listening and oral aspects of English. Comparison with peers from different regions was mentioned more often by first-year students who likely identified more strongly with their geographic backgrounds.

Test Types → Language Learning Strategies. The students suggested that test types influenced the strategies they used. Because a large portion of the tests came from the textbook, students directed great effort toward reading and reciting the texts. Some of the students reported that they ordinarily spent much of time on general skill-building activities such as listening to and reading authentic materials but that they would switch to a textbook-centered rote learning approach at least a few weeks before a test.

Gender → Language Aptitude. Many interviewees assumed that one gender was better than the other in language learning. A popular belief (from both males and females) was that “girls are better suited for language learning.”

Gender → *Language Learning Strategies*. The interviewees believed that males and females used different language learning strategies. For example, some of the interviewees reported that female students cared more about tests and therefore might have developed better ways to deal with test-related tasks.

Teacher Characteristics → *Class Arrangement*. A teacher's personality, philosophy, and skill were all perceived to influence the way they taught. For example, students felt that lively, dynamic, and energetic teachers were more likely to arrange the class and use the textbook in a more efficient way; foreign teachers (native speakers) usually were perceived to have more creative and interesting class activities than Chinese teachers.

Class Arrangement → *Comparison With Peers*. Certain class activities were seen to favor some of the students over others. The students who appeared to be better in these activities were then perceived as exerting pressure on their peers. For example, many students reported that they felt stress when other students outperformed them in activities involving listening and speaking.

Parental Influence → *Language Learning Strategies*. Some students reported that their parents' opinions had influenced and even determined the ways they studied English. For example, to improve their oral English, many of the students would go to public gathering places such as the "English Corner" in a park to practice English, but one student said that she did not go there because her parents thought it would not do her any good to speak English with other Chinese speakers. Even those students whose parents did not know any English reported that their parents provided general guidance on learning methods, time allocation, and test preparation.

Language Aptitude → *Comparison With Peers*. Many students reported that they were not as talented as language learners as their peers. For example, some mentioned that their "speed" of thinking and speaking the foreign language was not as fast as their peers'; some observed that others could "get twice the results with half the effort" because they were born with a special gift for language learning.

Comparison with Peers → *Foreign Language Anxiety*. Many students in the highly anxious group reported that they felt there was a large gap between them and their peers in many language learning abilities—comprehension, memorization, logical abilities. The more anxious learners generally rated themselves as lower in ability than did people in the moderate- and low-anxiety groups. The anxious interviewees used words like "anxious," "uncomfortable," and "envious" to describe their reactions toward perceived pressure from their peers.

Comparison with Peers → *Language Learning Interest and Motivation*. Many students believed that they had actually benefited from their competitive peers. Pressure resulting from comparisons with peers fostered a motivation that compelled them to work harder. Some students, however, noted that only a certain amount of pressure was helpful; too much pressure decreased both their interest and motivation.

Comparison with Peers → *Language Learning Strategies*. Some students said that their learning strategies changed frequently due to peer influence. For example, when they saw another student successfully using a book called *Vocabulary 5000*, they would buy it as well; or when they judged another student's listening ability to be good, they would try to obtain whatever listening materials that person was using. Some students were unable to develop a set of systematic strategies because they constantly followed their peers.

Language Learning Strategies → *Foreign Language Anxiety*. Failure to find effective learning strategies also resulted in anxious feelings in some interviewees. Many highly anxious students reported that they felt frustrated and lacked confidence in language learning, whereas the less anxious and anxiety-free students felt that although they had tried many strategies ("like fighting a guerrilla war"), the ones they had used had ultimately worked.

Language Learning Strategies → *Language Learning Interest and Motivation*. The interviewees reported that especially during the first year of university study, they would lose interest in studying English and had difficulty continuing when they were unable to find an appropriate way to approach a particular learning task.

Foreign Language Anxiety → *Language Learning Interest and Motivation*. A high level of anxiety was reported to result in less interest and lower motivation. For example, one student felt that she was not interested in the listening and speaking class because she usually felt very nervous in that class.

Language Learning Interest & Motivation → *Foreign Language Anxiety*. Many students believed that interest and motivation to learn English lessened pressure and decreased anxiety. On the other hand, they believed that by viewing a learning task as burdensome, they could easily become physically and/or emotionally exhausted. An extended task such as concentrating on a long listening passage would also increase feelings of anxiety.

Foreign Language Anxiety → *Achievement*. Many students reported that when they were in an informal, anxiety-free atmosphere, they could perform better. This was especially the case with respect to listening and speaking. The

students said that when they were not anxious, they could “hear more”; when it was not their turn to answer a question, they could speak more easily.

Language Learning Interest and Motivation → *Achievement*. The students believed that strong interest and motivation led to greater success in English. Some students felt that they would never have any difficulty being motivated, as both their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were so strong. However, they also reported that they sometimes did not feel interested in a particular task. Many students also reported trying to increase their interest levels. It was obvious that many learners believed in a connection between interest and achievement.

Discussion

The position of Foreign Language Anxiety in this model suggests that these students perceived anxiety as a result of other factors involved in their language learning. Foreign Language Anxiety was affected by the affinities appearing to the left of it in the model with variables such as Comparison with Peers, Learning Strategies, and Language Learning Interest and Motivation as the most immediate sources of anxiety in language learning for these students. Other variables such as Regional Differences, Test Types, Gender, Class Arrangement, Teacher Characteristics, Parental Influence, and Language Aptitude were considered by these students as more remote sources of anxiety because they show only indirect influence in the model; that is, these factors were perceived to influence Comparison with Peers and Language Learning Strategies, which in turn influenced anxiety.

Although anxiety and achievement are often found to have a bidirectional relationship (i.e., that in addition to anxiety influencing achievement, achievement [or lack thereof] also influences anxiety levels), the present model does not indicate the influence of achievement on anxiety. For these learners, the relationship between anxiety and achievement was perceived to be unidirectional. They only commented on how anxiety kept them from achieving and did not mention lack of achievement as contributing to their anxiety.

This grounded-theory model reveals a number of interesting relationships between and among anxiety and other language learning variables, and, importantly, it suggests how these variables might work together to influence students' learning of English in this specific Chinese setting. Specifically, the sequential order of influence of Class Arrangement on Achievement was identified through its influence on Comparison with Peers, Foreign Language Anxiety, or Interest

and Motivation, a relationship that echoes Shamim's (1996) finding that seating arrangements and teacher monitoring "may be a source of motivation for these students to work better" (p. 134). The model also suggests a bidirectional relationship between foreign language anxiety and motivation. Consistent with several previous studies (Ely, 1986; Lalonde & Gardner, 1984; Phillips, 1992; Samimy & Rardin, 1994), students' anxiety and motivation interacted with each other and both, in turn, were perceived to affect language learning. These relationships imply that lowering students' anxiety levels might also enhance their interest and motivation in language learning. By the same token, in addition to Language Learning Interest and Motivation, anxiety was found to be directly influenced by variables such as Comparison with Peers and Learning Strategies. Thus, in addition to fostering motivation, anxiety-reduction efforts should attempt to discourage students from comparing themselves with others and increase their repertoire of language learning strategies.

Regional Differences, Test Types, Gender, Teacher Characteristics, Class Arrangement, and Parental Influence also appeared as "remote sources" of Foreign Language Anxiety but direct influences of variables such as Comparison with Peers and Learning Strategies. In them, we might see the origins of language anxiety. Taken together, these findings suggest that language anxiety exists within a complex network of learning factors and that the goal of lowering students' language anxiety cannot be achieved without also addressing a number of these other factors as well. (Considering its place in the model, such a strategy also has the potential of increasing motivation for language learning.)

Fundamental to the research approach in this study is an understanding that the specific variables and the interrelationships among them are strictly grounded in this contextual environment. A very different picture might be drawn in a different setting. In interpreting the findings of the present study, one needs to bear in mind the distinctive sociocultural characteristics of English learning in China. For example, the influence of Confucian doctrines and traditional Chinese scholarly learning, as well as cultural differences in different areas in China surely played a role in the findings reported here particularly with respect to the influence of parents in language learning and students' feelings of superiority and inferiority with respect to their province of origin. We must also note that the complexities of a real-life situation are necessarily oversimplified in any model that depicts a linear flow of relationships among variables (Miles, 1997). Moreover, although systematic procedures for collecting and analyzing data were followed, any interpretation of verbal data is necessarily susceptible to subjectivity and bias. A better practice would be to include additional raters in the analytic process (see Northcutt, 1999). These limitations notwithstanding,

we believe that the model described here reasonably portrays the role of anxiety in language learning for these learners because it was grounded in their real-life experience and in their specific language learning context.

As suggested by Gardner et al. (1997), by considering variables collectively rather than investigating them separately, one can more easily “determine the processes by which individual difference variables influence how well people acquire a L2” (p. 356). Previous factor analytic studies (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989) have shed some light on these processes. However, it is clear that the interactions between and among individual variables take different forms in different contextual settings, and the perspectives of the learners can offer important insights into these relationships. Future studies of language anxiety should, thus, employ a wide range of analytic perspectives and direct clear attention to the sociocultural factors associated with language learning. In the present case, a GTA has proven very useful in identifying a potential model for the functioning of anxiety in language learning.

In terms of pedagogic implications, the findings suggest that sources of anxiety in classroom instruction can be productively identified through a GTA. Thus, in order to reduce students’ anxious feelings, sources of anxiety in specific language learning settings should be identified and modified wherever possible. Because the present model showed that the affinities with a direct influence on Foreign Language Anxiety were Learning Strategies, Comparison with Peers, and Interest and Motivation, helping students develop more effective language learning strategies, avoid comparisons with other students, and maintain interest and motivation could be useful antidotes to anxiety. For example, teachers might provide guidance in specific learning strategies or organize discussion sections for students to exchange opinions on learning strategies. In order to reduce pressure from comparison with peers, students of similar levels could be grouped together and offered appropriate materials for their level of language competence. Class activities could also be designed to encourage cooperation instead of competition, and adequate time for pair or group discussion could be allowed before oral responses are required. In raising students’ interest and motivation, more tedious classroom tasks (such as listening to the tapes and answering questions) could be broken into several shorter sections and a greater proportion of interesting authentic materials—songs, magazines, and movies—could be employed.

The more “remote sources” of anxiety, as suggested by the theoretical model, need to be addressed as well. For example, teachers should be aware of the role that students’ individual circumstances such as place of origin and parental influence might play in triggering anxiety. It also appears that teachers have

direct control of some anxiety-inducing elements such as classroom arrangements, test types, and their own demeanor.

Conclusion

The present study has confirmed, through a qualitative investigation, previously-reported quantitative findings on the negative impact of anxiety on second language achievement (see, e.g., Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 1989; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991b, 1991c; Phillips, 1992; Saito & Samimy, 1996). This study has also furthered our understanding of other factors associated with language anxiety (see, e.g., Gardner et al., 1997; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000; Young, 1991). Importantly, the theoretical model described here has not only suggested how anxiety might work in combination with other language factors to influence L2 achievement, but it has also provided a new approach for research addressing language anxiety as well as other L2 learning problems.

It is not surprising that such a personal and ego-involving endeavor as language learning is the subject of feelings of anxiety, and it is important to understand how this anxiety functions in language learning. The present study employed a relatively recent qualitative approach to examine learners' perceptions of the origins and consequences of anxiety in their language learning, and the resulting model suggests that personal issues strongly influence this anxiety. The interrelationship between anxiety and motivation is especially interesting in that motivation has also been found to be a strong predictor of success in language learning, and motivation is clearly tied to other important learner variables such as goals, expectations, and learning strategies. In addition, although motivation is generally conceived of as a positive trait with respect to language learning, it would also seem to play a role in affecting anxiety. It is difficult, for example, to imagine an anxious learner who had no desire or need to learn the language. Thus, further attention should be directed to understanding the relationship between motivation and anxiety in language learning. In addition, although this analysis of language learners in China offers an interesting glimpse into the development of language anxiety in an important language learning context, it is likely that the interactions between and among personal variables related to language learning will take different forms in different contextual settings. Future studies of language anxiety should direct clear attention to the personal and sociocultural factors associated with language learning.

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Notes

- 1 The coding can also be conducted with the help of computer software such as NUD.IST.
- 2 Although the OUT-IN balance is negative, the affinity “Learning Strategies” is classified as “Mediating Driver” rather than “Mediating Outcome.” This is mainly because the OUT-IN balance figure (−1) is much closer to that of the other “Mediating Drivers” (1) than it is to the “Mediating Outcomes” (−6).

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

A. GENETIC AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

1. Some students say that one needs to have special talents in order to learn a foreign language, some think that gender can make a difference . . . What personal characteristics do you think one needs to have in order to learn English well?
2. What do you think that schools or individuals can do to make up for the lack of these characteristics?

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. Is there anything about you that could make learning another language easier *or* more difficult?
2. What have you experienced in an English program that helps people of different personalities to learn what they need to learn?

B. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ELEMENTS

1. How much do you think other people's opinions could affect one in learning the language?

2. What, if any, is the parents' role in language learning?

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. Do you think peer pressure could affect you? How?
2. How would you rate your English compared with others?

C. MOTIVATION AND INTEREST

1. **How motivated does one need to be in order to learn the language well? What is your motivation in learning English?**
2. **English is required in your program. What part do you think "interest" plays in learning the language?**

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. How useful do you think English is in your life?
2. When did you start to feel interested in learning English?

D. INFLUENCE OF FIRST LANGUAGE (CHINESE)

1. **How do you feel one's level of Chinese can help or interfere with English learning?**
2. **How similar do you think Chinese and English are?**

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. What are some of the errors you or others make because of the influence of Chinese?
2. Some people say that because their Chinese is very good, they can't tolerate the fact that their English is not as satisfactory, and therefore they decide to give up. What do you think about this?

E. CLASS ARRANGEMENTS

1. **If you were the English teacher, how would you change the way English is taught in class?**
2. **How much pressure do you feel concerning your English classes?**

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. What is the format of your English classes?
2. What are the things you like most about your English classes? What are those you dislike most?

F. REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

- 1. How (and how much) do you think one's dialect could affect his/her English?**
- 2. Which regions produce better language learners?**

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. What is your dialect? How does it affect your foreign language learning?
2. Where are you from? How well do you think people from your area can learn the language?

G. TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS

- 1. How are your Western English teachers compared with your Chinese English teachers?**
- 2. What influences have you received from your teachers in learning English?**

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. What kind of English do you like most?
2. Which teacher do you think has influenced you most? In what way?

H. TEST TYPES

- 1. What is the focus of English tests in your program?**
- 2. How does the focus of English tests affect your focus of learning?**

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. What kind of tests do you have in your classes? What other kinds of tests have you taken or prepared to take outside the class?
2. How do you prepare for these tests? How important do you think your preparation for the tests is to your day-to-day learning?

I. ANXIETIES

- 1. Some students report that they experience anxiety in learning English. What do you think makes people feel anxious about the process?**
- 2. How does anxiety affect one's language learning?**

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. When do you feel anxious about learning the language?

2. What do you think should be changed in the program that could reduce people's anxiety in language learning?
3. If a student were nervous about learning English, what kind of advice you would give him/her?

J. INDIVIDUAL LEARNING APPROACHES

- 1. What method(s) do you think is/are most effective in learning English?**
- 2. What other learning activities are you involved in besides your English classes in the program?**

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. How do you learn vocabulary? How do you practice listening, speaking, reading and writing?
2. How effective is your own learning method compared to the ones teachers suggest?

K. ACHIEVEMENT

- 1. What do you think makes some people better in English than others?**
- 2. What are the chances of you not achieving much in the language?**

Potential probes or alternate forms if little or no response:

1. How do you plan to study English better in the future?
2. What measures would you use to define "achievement" in English?

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